

ICANN chief stepping down in early 2016

21 May 2015



Fadi Chehade, chief executive of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) says he has accepted a job in the private sector

The head of the group that oversees all Internet addresses will step down early next year, after a plan to end US oversight of the key nonprofit organization.

Fadi Chehade sent notice to the board of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN) on Thursday announcing he would leave after an annual meeting to be held in Morocco in March.

"I think this is the right time and the right thing to do," Chehade said in an exclusive interview with AFP.

"This is not about me. ICANN is much bigger than any one person, we are just folks passing here to keep this important ship strong and moving forward."

Chehade praised an "absolutely superb" team at ICANN that has been moving the organization from a predominately US-based operation to a global institution with offices and relationships spread around the world.

Chehade said he has accepted a job in the private sector, outside of the domain name space which ICANN supervises. He promised to disclose the name of his new employer later this year, saying that his focus now remains on ICANN.

He has agreed to remain on as an advisor to ICANN as long as the board needs him to be.

"During the remaining 10 months of my tenure, it's business-as-usual," he said.

Before joining ICANN as its CEO in late 2012, he served as chief executive of Vocado LLC, a US cloud software firm that he founded and which was acquired by IBM.

"I left a company I built to take a service at ICANN and took my attention away from my family's charity," Chehade said.

Expansion and change

Chehade has been at the ICANN helm during a historic expansion of domain addresses far beyond a long-used handful such as .com, .net, and .org.

He is also leading the organization out from under US oversight to a body more representative of the global community.

Chehade remained confident that a transition plan to "global stewardship" would be ready by the end of this year despite criticism in the US Congress, where some lawmakers have resisted the plan to end Washington's key management role for ICANN.

Chehade said all the necessary components for a new oversight scheme are accounted for and there will be "major legitimizing endorsements" from several countries in coming weeks.

He conceded that it was hard to predict how matters will progress after the plan is presented to the US Congress.

"I am confident that by March that work will be finished and, hopefully by then, the Congress will have had a chance to understand it," he said.

The pieces are in place to supplant a contract ICANN has with the US Department of Commerce, according to Chehade.

The US government said last year it would end its technical oversight role for the Internet domain system, with the stipulation that it be managed without direct control by governments or intergovernmental bodies like the United Nations.

Chehade said some 150 countries now support the shift of ICANN oversight away from the US government to a globally representative group of governments, civil society and businesses.

ICANN is in charge of assigning Internet domain names and the numbering codes that lie behind online addresses. The California-based nonprofit has been overseen by the US government since its inception in 1998, under a contract that expires on September 30.

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APA citation: ICANN chief stepping down in early 2016 (2015, May 21) retrieved 27 November 2020 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-05-icann-chief-early.html>

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